

Inclusion, fairness key to battling racism

Over the last several months a group of us from around the country — including teachers, retired senior military officers, former ambassadors, non-profit leaders and clergy — have discussed (1) how to counter systemic racism and (2) how to assure fair representation through free and fair elections.

These two concepts are embraced by the term Inclusion: the responsibilities of knitting together a nation and the responsibility for all to vote. We believe both aspects involve combinations of legal reform, political leadership, educating for responsible citizenship, and making inclusion a key part of U.S. foreign policy. Countering racism will also involve strong economic recovery steps focused on jobs the poor can qualify for, and much more equitable taxation.

We have examined the two national political platforms to see how they treat inclusion. They couldn't be more different.

The Democratic Party's platform covers almost all the recommendations we have proffered to both campaigns. One major section, called "Healing the Soul of America," includes 10 pages on expanding rights. Another dozen pages focuses on "Building a Stronger, Fairer Economy."

A section on strengthening democracy covers campaign finance reform, voting rights enforcement, and more self-governance and representation possibilities for the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the territories. The longest section is on foreign policy with a clear human rights theme. Carrying out all these proposals would make significant progress towards a more inclusive America.

We would add that civics education, including a one-year course prior to high school graduation, and an expansion of voluntary public service — such as AmeriCorps and Peace Corps — should be part of fostering inclusion in our current and future generations.

Analyzing the 2020 Republican platform is simpler. There isn't one. Instead, the party opted to continue the 2016 platform as if no major changes have occurred in the last four years. President Trump subsequently issued a list of priorities for his "second term." It emphasizes strengthening police, increasing criminal penalties, ending cashless bail, and prosecuting "violent extremist

groups like Antifa." The president prioritizes reducing "welfare," improving performance requirements for poverty programs, and unlawfully imposing work requirements for such programs as Medicaid, SNAP and CHIP.

Without specifics, the president also promises to create one million small businesses and ten million jobs in ten months, plus returning one million manufacturing jobs from China as well as increasing immigration restrictions. The president's priorities do not address the issues of voting rights or free and fair elections.

One can only conclude that one party will expand inclusion while the other will expand exclusion.

There are two major aspects of the Democratic platform's approach which any new administration should seriously embrace.

First, there must be an end to the idea of zero-sum racial politics. Fair rights for all will materially enhance the well-being of all Americans: Blacks, browns and especially whites, many of whom, particularly in rural communities, have had the short end of the stick. Equal access to improved education, infrastructure and business creation applies to all Americans. Any systemic inclusion initiative should be a matter of regular public reporting, regular use of the bully pulpit by a range of leaders, and frequent briefings stressing the benefits of inclusion for all Americans.

Second, working to create a far more inclusive America is a major theme that cuts across all segments of the federal government. It needs high-level coordination so it is seen as a true national effort rather than as only a one-party initiative. Its image as a national effort can be made plain if it is coordinated in a bi-partisan way. The model of aid to Haiti's 2010 earthquake comes to mind. President Obama appointed former Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton as co-coordinators of the U.S. response. A similar pattern should be developed by a President Biden, appointing former Presidents G.W. Bush and Barack Obama to co-lead a high-level advisory group guiding the administration's work on Inclusion.

If we start with the symbolism of bipartisanship in working for inclusion, there are better odds that over time people of both parties can come together to finally heal this country and make it a better democracy.

Biden's vision is well focused and aims to heal America. Trump's agenda favors destructive politics and exclusion over inclusion.

Robert J. Berg is past chairman of the Alliance for Peacebuilding. Donald C. Arthur, a retired vice admiral, was surgeon general of the Navy. They wrote this exclusively for the Tampa Bay Times.



**ROBERT J.
BERG**



**DONALD C.
ARTHUR**